

RAPANUI IDENTITY AND ITS SURVIVING CULTURE

Bernardita Skinner Huerta

A SURVIVING CULTURE

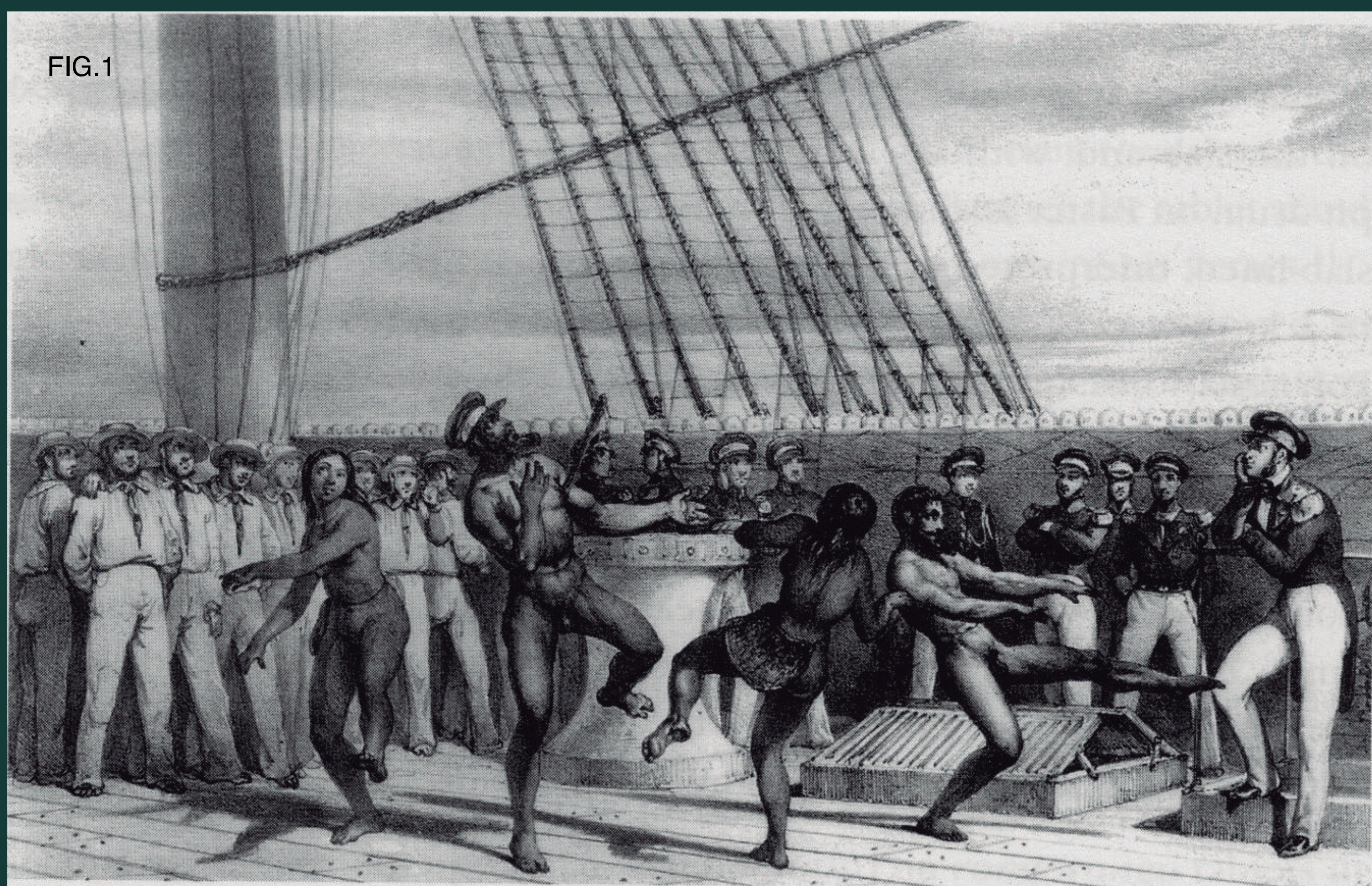


Fig 1: Natives dancing at the "Venus" vessel in front of the French Admiral Abel Dupetit, 1838 (it is observed a native using a marine cap on the ship).

Re-signification of adopted elements from different cultures, following local guides, is considered quite common in isolated territories across the world. Indeed in Easter Island we find clear examples of this in various aspects of life, from the use made of different objects, to a specific recycling of language, even of sound and music. This is part of the island's history and is a key characteristic of the Rapa Nui's identity.

"People who came to the island in ancient times, were possibly already fleeing from a decadent culture and they yet managed to build a unique civilization on the Pacific", told Julio Hotus in a 2006's interview in which he explained that the insecurity of long sea voyages from Polynesia left many of them on the road. In this sense, the annexation to the Chilean territory itself would once again be a sign of surviving knowledge, adopting elements from other cultures and communities with whom they were having contact over time.

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REALITY THAT SELLS

Since the Catholic missionaries arrival to the island in 1864, the local customs and the evangelizing practices were nourishing each other until reaching a merge which was mainly reflected in holidays and their organization. Although the oldest rapanui usages remained, they were no longer dedicated to Make Make (the creator god) but to the Virgin Mary or San Pedro. The new dogma was adapted to the most traditional customs, so that even the ancestor worship was strengthened.

Being these customs so rooted in the rapanui culture, the elders feel them as very traditional. But today, the situation changes again and what is left behind is just the religious holidays in privilege of tourism and tourists.

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MARINE OR "MATAROAS" FASHION

FIG.4



Fig.4: Celebration, Rano Kau, 1915 (Mapse collection)

If we talk about 1910, about the 20 ', 30' and even 50 ', it can be mentioned that the most elegant thing in Easter Island was being dressed in naval clothes which were obtained by interacting with the Chilean Navy. Many photos presented here are the testimony of parties and ceremonies in which the uniformed rapanui people were confused with real marines. Even the term "marine" was used as a positive qualifier in a given time (Bendrup, 2005: 218).

Although it is not about the "cargo cult" as seen in other isolated areas, emulation and interpretation of certain activities could be conceived as such in the sense of admiration for the outsider. As we shall see, at that time the word "marine" were used to refer to someone important, being the naval clothes the most elegant dresses.

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THE ARRIVAL OF GERMAN SQUADRON DURING FIRST WORLD WAR



Fig. 13: The Mayor Pedro Atán dressed as a marine and playing the accordion, Photo by RebecaYáñez 1957/ Central Archive Andrés Bello – Universidad de Chile.

A second episode much more accurate about the arrival of the accordion, can be placed in the First World War context. Alberto Hotus and Kiko Pate referred to the presence of Germans in the island (before the battle of Coronel, Chile) saying they brought accordions and they were “with buttons” the same as they know them.

Kiko remembered that German songs were sung at the old times and he had been told they came from “when the Germans were here.” On that occasion Margarita Hucke, who was also present, asked him: “What about the ta hati ratí?”. He nodded and they both sang really excited. She made a demonstration while he sang and played the Kahuaja in his wheelchair. To performance this dance they have to wear marine suits and apparently it really has to do with the European contact during the First World War. This dance would have disappeared in the 40s’.

“Germans came here, came and lived here for a long time, medium. Germans who arrived in a boat, ten or twelve ships. Arrived in time of war, Kaiser’s war, not Hitler’s. The first year of the war. Came and stayed here, During the day, Boats, went off shore and circled; it appears that there were more boats outside”,

Kiko Pate, remembered (Astronomic Rapanui notions, 1997, Margot & Julio Hotus). ”

An antique song tells about a dozen warships in Easter Island, which came from Prussia, Germany, at the time of World War I, addressing his goals. In the second verse refers to Tui (Orion’s Belt), visible at sunset just for a short time, and then lost in the horizon. That was the moment when the interpreter watched the boats:

*Ka ara mea
Song by Porotu Hongii*

*"Ka ara mea a koro ika raro
tangitangi te korohua e*

*He ngaro vave koe e te Tui e
he ngaro vave koe e te Tui e*

*Ka ara te uati mata me'ume'u e
mata me'ume'u i te hauruanga*

*Mai ta'e turu au ki te ahu reva e
ki te ahu toto reva a te 'purutia'*

*Ki te ahu toto reva o te 'purutia'
tangitangi te ngongoro e*

THE VICTROLA IN 20 'AND 30' RAPANUI SOCIETY

Henry Percy would have been who introduced this music device that revolutionized Easter Island society in 1924 or 1925. A few years after bringing the first victrola to his wife, Mr. Edmunds would have brought two more, one for Alberto Paoa Bornier and the other one for his brother Simon Paoa bornier. Simón Paoa used to walk with the victrola on his shoulders, making a journey from the upper part of the town along the main street to one side and another until the night.

"At Mrs. Victoria Rapahango's house (...) over there the records were played, and there were Maori songs, and you could hear some words similar to the Rapanui, so people went there to listen to." as Alberto Hotus told. It was the management house located in Mataverí.

Kiko Pate, making a contemplation gesture while he put a hand on his face and sighed, also remembered what he had been told about that time, "people went to Mataverí, they lay down on the floor and they listened to in that position."

PUNI PUNI

The Rapanui name given to the victrola was "Puni Puni". Juan Edmunds remembered that this was due to one of the first records his father brought to his mother Victoria Rapahango as a gift: "The song was called 'Puni Puni Lai Ka ero', in English, so hence the name was adopted", he claimed.

Papa Kiko at first could not remember why the victrola was named in that way, but when he remembered he was excited and he sang:

“Puni Puni rai ka ero wat si se será, ay tirarí”

Then he repeated it and sang:

*“na na ay rai ka ero wat si sé, si sé si sé
Ay ka hero wat si puni poro poro hero
Wat si será ay tu raré
ay rai ka ero...puni puni poro poro hero
puni rai ka ero wat si será...ay turaré”*

Kiko Pate admitted he didn't know what the lyrics said, because it was not the original lyric; it was in English so they listened, learned the melody and sang like that.

THE SONG

It was suggested that it would be a 1909 song called "My Pony Boy", in which verses can clearly be heard the "Puni Puni" (pony) and the "lai ka hero" (like an arrow). The song was worldwide popular in the 20's and it has been repeatedly occupied in western movies.

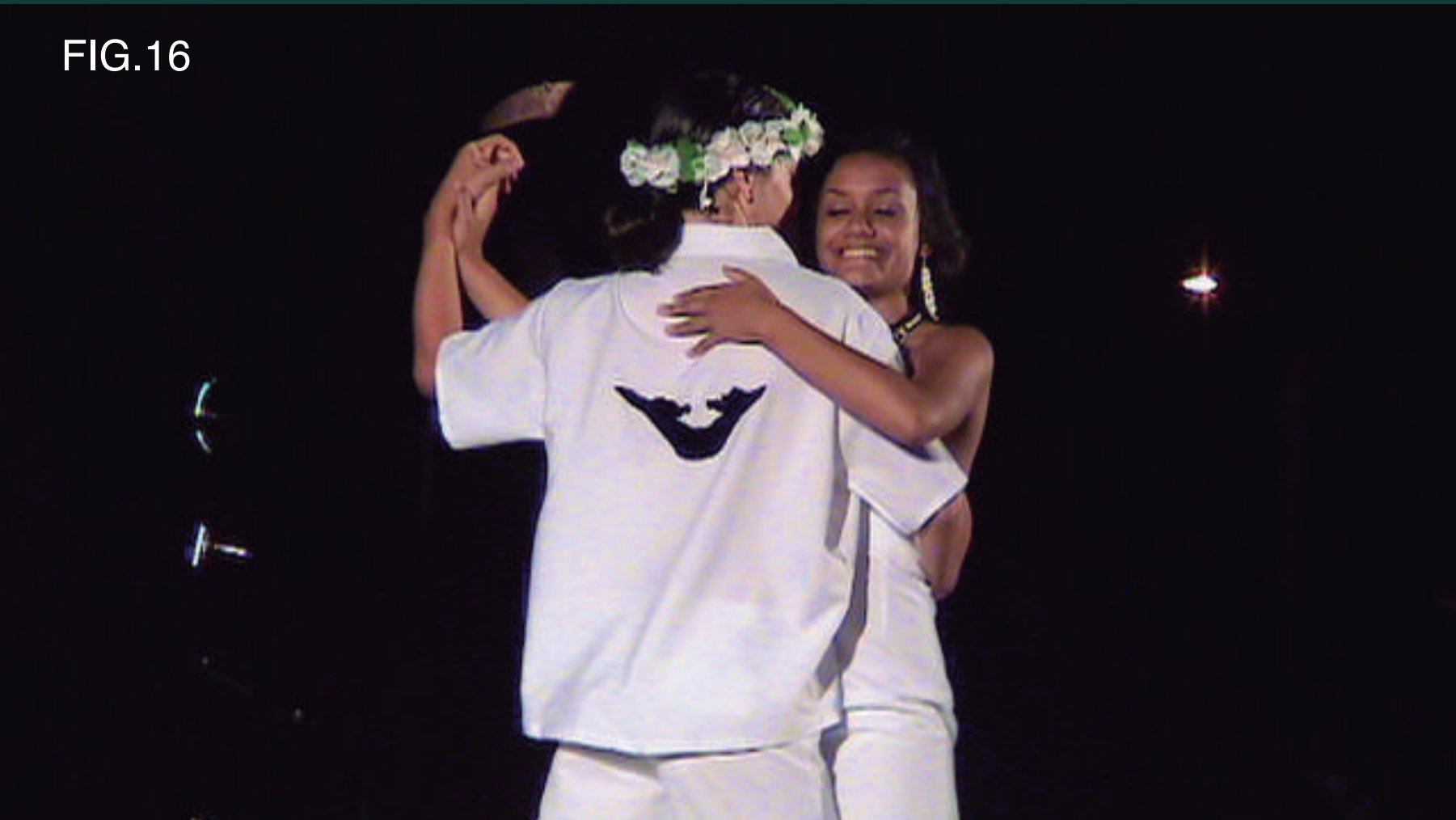
*“My Pony Boy” (first stanza and chorus)
“Way out west, in a nest from the rest, dwelt the
bestest little Bronco Boy. He could ride, he could
glide o'er the prairies like an arrow. Every maid in the
glade was afraid he would trade his little heart away,
So each little peach made a nice little speech of love
to him;*

*Pony Boy, Pony Boy, won't you be my Tony Boy?
Don't say no. Here we go off across the plains.
Marry me, carry me right away with you.
Giddy up, giddy up, giddy up, whoa! My Pony Boy”*

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THE RAPANUI TANGO OR TARARAINA



About the first tango exponents in Rapa Nui, there are at least two versions with some shared elements. Kiko Pate said it was a marriage that by the 30's came to take over Civil Registry Office.

However, the most popular version identifies Viviana Pakarati as the first island woman taught in this type of dance. And although some people say she learned it from a Chilean Marine, Jorge Edmunds (Rapahango, 2004) and Alberto Hotus said she was taught by the political deportees in 1932. Chilean politicians confined on island territory would have been the firsts in carrying the tango record to Easter Island and the firsts in teaching them the Argentinean dance to the locals. This would have achieved good relations with the islanders, participating with them in festivals and activities. (Rapahango, 2004).

That tango record that those political actors brought, was the base for the creation of the following songs. The Tango Rapanui we can appreciate today is different to Argentinean.

GUITAR ADOPTION

The rapanui oral tradition places this fact in the late 30's, after a German yacht arrival to the island. There were two presumed samoans aboard it (or tahitians or hawaiians, according to different versions). The name of the vessel was "The Valkyrie" or "Dier Walkiria" (Bendrups, 2005: 217) "(samoans) One was called Mape and the other Henere ... they brought the kitara and the ukulele, and people saw them", Kiko Pate told (Interview, Hanga Roa, 2007). It would also be the time when the Sau-Sau was introduced to the rapanui repertoire.

According to Jorge Edmunds testimony, (included in Daniel Bendrups "Continuity in Adaptation: A History of Rapa Nui Music"), Juan Atan and Guillermo Teao, were responsible to respectively remind the sound and the shape of the guitar, with the purpose to manufacture their own (Bendrups, 2005: 218).

"Kiermo" Teao Riroroko effectively succeeded in manufacturing his own guitar, in spite of the ridicule jokes from those who saw him working on it, just like Kiko Pate remembered: The guitar manufactured by Teao was mainly made up of a rectangular tin in which peaches were formerly packaged. Those tins were called Pahu Peti, and even today the term "peti" (peach) is used to refer to something good, something sweet.



Fig.17: Tapatí Rapa Nui 2007

Pahu Peti's version of Guillermo Teao's song (translated version by Dan Bendrups):

*"The plans are ready
(Assuredly)
For the robbery (of vengeance)
Are those the marines there?
Playing the important ones?
They laugh, they all laugh*

*At my crazy work
They laugh, they laugh*

*At my crippled feet
(But) how great it sounds!
The sound of my guitar, now"*

Later, rapanui people improved the technology and began to elaborate their own guitars with plywood and Miro Tahití (Paradise Tree).

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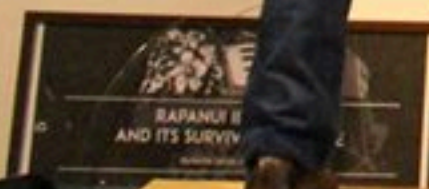




















TRANSPACIFIC CONTACTS: THE MAPUCHE CONNECTION

Just Miguel Martinez, 2009





THE PACIFIC CONTACTS:
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MOCHILA ISLAND